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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP, NEA/RA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [ELAB](#) [KMPI](#) [KTIP](#) [AE](#)
SUBJECT: UNOFFICIAL TIP SHELTER OPTIONS IN UAE

REFS: A) 07 ABU DHABI 1272, B) 07 DUBAI 629, C) 08 ABU DHABI 377, D)
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Classified by DCM Douglas Greene, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is a joint Embassy Abu Dhabi - Consulate General Dubai cable.

12. (SBU) Summary: In both Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the UAE's main urban hubs, unofficial shelters have been established over time to accommodate the immediate needs of vulnerable groups (one of the more active being run by the Philippine Embassy). After speaking to shelter managers, embassies and consulates, it is clear that while there is some progress in official efforts to shelter victims of domestic abuse and trafficking (septel), ad hoc shelters emerge to fill a gap when official facilities are inadequate relative to the scale and complexity of the problem. End summary.

13. (U) In preparation for the 2008 report on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and in an effort to assess the services available to victims of domestic violence and trafficking, PolOffs talked to representatives from labor-sending countries and visited select shelters run by foreign missions. We also reviewed the status of the only non-governmental shelter, City of Hope.

Foreign Government Facilities

Philippines

14. (SBU) The Consulate General of the Philippines in Dubai administers its own Welfare shelter, as does the Philippine Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Typical clients are Filipina domestic workers seeking refuge from abusive employers. The shelter's goal is to help women either find new employment or return to the Philippines. Filipina women are reportedly informed of the Embassy and Consulate shelters before leaving the Philippines during a mandatory one-day seminar. When a woman contacts the shelter for assistance, she is taken to the hospital for medical documentation in abuse cases. The shelter also encourages the woman to file a police report as soon as possible.

15. (C) A villa with a capacity of about 50 currently shelters 90 women (and has accommodated up to 120) in Dubai. Women typically stay at the shelter for a few days to a few weeks (two have been there for more than a year because legal disputes with employers have "dragged on" and they have not been permitted to work while awaiting adjudication of their cases). There are more than 30 Filipino community organizations that help the shelter financially; Filipino community organizations would reportedly rather support the Consulate's shelter than work with the "official" Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWC), which is perceived to be principally for UAE nationals and women trafficked from Eastern Europe.
(Comment: The Filipino community is tight knit in supporting its

citizens -- particularly those in domestic jobs who are perceived to be at a disadvantage in the local justice system -- in resolving conflicts with Emirati employers. While Filipinas would likely be welcome at DFWC, these ad hoc arrangements are currently more comfortable and the DFWC has done no outreach to attract this demographic. End comment.)

¶16. (C) The Philippines Embassy in Abu Dhabi also has a shelter in which it currently houses 135 women in a space with a capacity to accommodate 40 comfortably. The shelter offers similar services to that offered by the Consulate General's Dubai facility. The Dubai Consulate General claims to have recently recommended that the Philippine government impose a ban on additional Filipinas traveling legally to Dubai to work as domestics. The Consul recognizes this may not stop workers from coming because the demand is high, but he thought it was important to be "on the record" as flagging potential victimization. The Consulate does as much as it can to ensure that every contract is sound. All contracts are reportedly approved in advance at the Embassy/Consulate and sent back to Manila to process paperwork prior to travel to the UAE. Once the women are in Dubai, unfortunately, the Consulate generally loses contact with them unless/until they become a victim seeking help.

India

¶17. (SBU) The Consulate General of India in Dubai works closely with a shelter run by the Indian Community Welfare Organization; like the Philippines shelter, it has no relationship with DFWC. The Indian community in Dubai is the single largest ethnic group in the city, with estimates nearing a million people. The Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi also runs a small shelter that houses up to eight women at a time before they are either repatriated or their disputes with their employers resolved.

Sri Lanka

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¶18. (SBU) The Consulate General of Sri Lanka in Dubai has its own shelter, and assists people for up to two weeks. The Consulate asked EmbOff for the DFWC's contact information, expressing a preference to send its nationals to the official shelter. (Comment: The Sri Lankan Consulate would likely welcome the transfer of its sheltering burden to the well-financed DFWC if it were aware of -- and confident in -- the latter's capacity to assist its nationals. End comment.)

Indonesia

¶19. (SBU) Indonesia has a sizable facility next to its Embassy in Abu Dhabi where domestic workers in limbo are housed temporarily, and appears to operate on a similar basis to other shelters associated with diplomatic missions (i.e., accepting only its own nationals and coordinating their cases cautiously with the host government).

¶10. (SBU) Post was unable to clarify facilities run by all governments of large labor-sending countries (including Bangladesh and Nepal). Pakistan, as a rule, does not allow women to work in the UAE as domestic servants and therefore has not identified a need for those types of social services. (Pakistan did cooperate with a temporary sheltering facility for child camel jockeys in the repatriation process in past years.)

CITY OF HOPE

¶11. (C) The informal Dubai-based NGO City of Hope (CoH), run by AmCit and naturalized Emirati Sharla Musabih, remains the only privately run shelter option in the UAE (ref C). CoH has in the past taken in a number of endangered AMCITS, as well as women under threat (some referred by the Dubai Police). Musabih is a controversial and outspoken figure who is, by what we can determine, engaged in a bitter feud with the Director of the DFWC. The viability of CoH as a shelter has subsequently been cast in doubt over the last year as it faces funding problems, has been pilloried in the local press for alleged mismanagement and corruption, and just escaped closure

(primarily due to non-payment of rent and utilities) on at least two occasions. According to Musabih, who has been outside the UAE for some months, the shelter currently houses 12 women and four children. She fears imminent closure due to payment concerns and has expressed interest in exploring options for relocating the facility to Abu Dhabi where she assumes her disagreements with Dubai authorities will not plague her as much.

Comment

¶12. (C) The various unofficial shelters in Dubai and Abu Dhabi would be more successful if they coordinated efforts for greater efficiency, drew synergies from one another's experience, established common best practices, and sought economies of scale; however, the single nationality structure of many of the shelters cuts against such cooperation. Moreover, many of these shelters prefer to operate quietly, trying to the extent possible to stay below the authorities' radar. The local police and government know they are there, but since they provide a useful service (and so long as they don't make public waves) they are usually allowed to operate with unofficial consent. The U.S. Mission has recommended to the UAEG's anti-TIP committee that it expand awareness of the several shelters and deepen coordination with diplomatic missions. Closer cooperation would also expand understanding of TIP and domestic violence in a society where such topics have traditionally been taboo in public (but are now increasingly noted in the media). The anti-TIP committee is also preparing an awareness campaign targeting airport travelers and the general public to sensitize them to the hazards of TIP, which may help alert vulnerable laborers to both the dangers and options for assistance. End comment.

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